



COMMUNITY PROFILE

The **Bluegrass South Regional Economic Development Coalition** is a regional initiative among the economic development professionals in nine Central Kentucky counties: Anderson, Boyle, Casey, Garrard, Lincoln, Marion, Mercer, Taylor, and Washington. Bluegrass South is a region of vibrant, progressive communities in the Kentucky heartland strategically positioned between the Louisville and Lexington metro areas with business development assets and advantages that are easily accessible via four major highway corridors (KY 55, US 127, US 150, and US 27) to the Bluegrass Parkway and Interstates 64, 65, and 75.

From a series of collegial luncheon conversations and visioning that grew to include the representatives of nine counties, the concept of a new regional approach was born. The coalition partners of Bluegrass South emphasize “collaborative regionalism” as their guiding principle to promote three objectives:

- 1) market cooperatively this newly-defined region to site selection consultants and corporate decision-makers;
- 2) share openly information and best practices to improve the performance of local economic development organizations and their executives; and
- 3) advocate aggressively for region-wide public policy issues and solutions that enhance the overall business climate for the participating counties.

What is collaborative regionalism? Bluegrass South’s partners define it as an approach that transcends organizational structures or hierarchies or inequities that can often doom the success of regional efforts. Bluegrass South began with a recognition of common cause for economic development challenges shared by the counties. From this starting point, the collegial trust and working relationships among the counties’ economic development executives opened the door to working together and leveraging combined financial, technical, and human resources. In particular, the coalition utilizes common resources and strengths (such as those offered by E.ON U.S./Kentucky Utilities, our Kentucky Touchstone Cooperatives, and the Cabinet for Economic Development) to further its efforts.

Bluegrass South targets low-cost, high-return marketing efforts by pooling our resources and tapping our utilities’ contacts to develop inbound events or outbound missions to trade shows and/or to schedule in-office visits with consultants or corporate staff. We market the region first and all of the sites/buildings available

within it. After that point, each county responds to specific interest in their product. It's all based upon the trust and friendship that we have with one another and our desire to more effectively promote this region.

What does Bluegrass South have to offer? A review of just the numbers from the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development's web profile for Bluegrass South tells a compelling story in positioning our region to compete with larger metropolitan areas:

- Region Population: **186,346**
- Labor Market Area: **31 counties**
- Labor Market Area Population: **1,280,552**
- Civilian Labor Force: **641,246**
- Total Available Labor: **47,566**

The Bluegrass South effort has had a fast start and a remarkable impact upon joint enterprise of the participating counties. The highlights of our coalition's success are detailed as follows:

✓ **Marketing:**

- In September 2009, the Bluegrass South team hosted an event for Louisville-area commercial realtors at the Maker's Mark Distillery in Loretto, Marion County. The event was sponsored jointly by the Kentucky Touchstone Cooperatives that serve our region, most notably Inter-County Energy and Salt River Electric. Another event for commercial realtors in the Lexington and Cincinnati areas is being planned to occur in April 2010 at the Wild Turkey Distillery near Lawrenceburg, Anderson County. We recognize that our regional "proof" is potent, so why not use it to our advantage?
- Bluegrass South has submitted a full-page regional advertisement for the 2010 edition of the *Kentucky Economic Development Guide* sponsored by the Cabinet and published by Journal Communications. Danville/Boyle County ceded its reserved ad position in the *Guide* in support of the regional approach. The cost of the ad was prorated among eight participating counties by percentage of total population.
- Similar to the approach with the advertisement, Bluegrass South is now considering participation in the new KentuckyUnited marketing cooperative as a Level 1 Sponsor. The cost for each county will be significantly less than individual sponsorship, and participation in marketing trips will be rotated among the partners.
- Recently, the Cabinet for Economic Development business development staff recognized the value of our efforts by channeling the response to a call center project through the regional group.

Among the nine counties, seven eligible properties were jointly proposed via Bluegrass South for possible consideration by this project.

- ✓ **Information:** With the assistance of the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development's information technology staff, a Bluegrass South profile was created in late 2009 for inclusion in the Cabinet's Economic Development Information System (EDIS). Further, Cabinet staff designed a template for a basic informational website which will be further developed through the resources of the Bluegrass Area Development District. When launched, that website will be found at www.BluegrassSouth.com. With cost-free resources online such as Google Apps, each of the counties' representatives has his own "@BluegrassSouth.com" e-mail address which is directly accessible via the web, assures equal access to information, and provides individual contact to each county through a branded identity.

- ✓ **Advocacy:**
 - To engage our local board chairs and officials, Bluegrass South hosted a luncheon in Danville in November 2009 at which Business Development Commissioner Jim Navolio and Financial Incentives Deputy Commissioner Katie Smith of the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development reviewed House Bill 3 incentive reforms and briefed the group on the Cabinet's recruitment efforts.
 - To ensure the support of our Cabinet partners, the coalition attended a "Monday morning staff meeting" in force in December 2009 to detail our initiative, with the unexpected opportunity to have a top-tier site selection consultant in the audience who commended and encouraged our enterprise.
 - In conjunction with KAED's "Day at the Capitol" on March 16, 2010, State Senator Jimmy Higdon and State Representative Lonnie Napier are scheduled to host an event with our Bluegrass South regional legislative caucus. Both the economic development executives and board chairs will participate in this event to discuss public policy as well as infrastructure issues which are common concerns to the region as a whole.

The partners of the Bluegrass South Regional Economic Development Coalition have begun a journey together which will certainly adapt in the future to changing circumstances and challenges. Wherever it leads us, we firmly believe that we are on the right path. And, through our effort, Bluegrass South hopes to demonstrate to other communities across the Commonwealth that collaborative regionalism is a viable opportunity to forge a competitive whole that is indeed greater than the sum of its parts.